

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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The Demo Museum

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I first ate at the Casa de Bandini when I was nine years old. I remember my mom ordered a drink that was the size of a small birdbath, all frothy and green with salt crystals around the edges of the blue rimmed glass. I remember the fountain; I wanted to play inside it and I knew I was not allowed. More recently I watched the removal of that very fountain. I was the archaeological monitor witnessing and documenting as a large piece of equipment tore apart the tiles around the fountain. I gathered pieces of the remaining tiles and labeled them for the Demolition Museum of the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Each item of the Demo Museum has a label noting where they were found, and what era of this building's dynamic history they represent. Walking in the wake of destruction collecting rubble, photographing where these items once were, and cre-

ating photo documents with arrow and circles showing their initial location in and around the building, is part of creating this little museum. Parts of this Demo collection will be exhibited in the Cosmopolitan once it is completed.

As layers of the walls and floors are removed, samples are collected. My office is filled with random objects: doors, pieces of wood, lamps, tile, a fire place mantel and chunks of concrete. The samples range from when this building was the residence of Juan Bandini's family ca. 1829, through January 2008 when the restaurant ceased operation in preparation of this grand undertaking.

Every act of destruction was followed by an act of creation so that any attachment to anything destroyed was replaced by diligent documentation on my part. Then, on September 8th 2008, the Bougainvillea was cut down. Over the past year and a half that I have been working at this building I have marveled at how many tourists pause for photos before the expansive backdrop of the Bougainvillea's magenta floral leaves. This plant graced almost the entire Mason St. side of the building

extending in every direction. It wove its way through the 1950's wrought iron pot holders hanging off the rusticated wooden railings of the second story. Here, in the Demo museum, a single wrought iron pot holder has a piece of this Bougainvillea grown thickly through its circle. Here it remains as material evidence of that plant's existence. The Bougainvillea was the last, very literally, living element of the building's most recent era.

Jallaludin Mohammad Rumi, a 13th century poet wrote: "One whose garment is torn on the road to love becomes free at last of all defects." Existentially speaking, the garment is the body and abandoning attachment to it, one is freed and rendered essential again. Now the building is naked, striped; its garment has been torn. In the spirit of this poem, the removal of the plant is an unveiling of the building's true nature. Admittedly, the destruction of this once living relic has been difficult to endure, yet the creation that lies ahead is unparalleled.

